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THE NEW PATH.

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SCULPTURE.

WHAT ought our sculptors to do for us?

There is, perhaps, no general question about art requiring more care to answer. It is easy to see what sculptors have done of old, and in what manner they reached their greatest triumphs. It is not difficult to see what circumstances now would produce much good sculpture, with constant possibility of great. But how, under the present circumstances, our sculptors should work, is not so clear. If the architects were doing their duty, the question would never need to be asked; as they do not, we must ask it, with but little hope of an entirely satisfactory answer.

Having such a question before us, the perfectly logical and proper thing to do is to go back to those times when good sculpture was common, and see what circumstances those were which produced it. It is peculiarly necessary that we should do so in the case of sculpture, for there is no art at present so undefined in its aims, so far removed from its greatness in past time, so utterly abnormal in its condition.

The limits of this article will not allow an account of sculpture in all ages, nor is such necessary to our purpose. Let us consider only the three great periods of the Art, that of the Greek school, during the independence of Greece and during the dominion of Rome, that of the middle ages, and

that of the Renaissance immediately resulting from both. Even of these we propose no exhaustive analysis, but only such statement of well ascertained facts and inevitable conclusions as may help us in our future inquiries.

The awful perfection of Greek sculpture is such, that inquiry by us into the principles of the work, seems almost as if Australian savages should try to ascertain the principles on which Steers modelled the "America." One great difference, however, between the civilized and the savage man is in the former's unlimited power of inquiry. Though no living man can do what the Greeks did, yet any one can find out how they did it, if he will be modest and content to learn from observation.

The Greek "ideal" was a worldly one, as splendid as dwellers on the earth only could make it. The world was to them a glorious place, and they who dwelt upon it glorious and powerful beings. Their country and climate made living itself a pleasure. Their life was healthy, enterprising, full of interest; their bodies strong and delicate, vigorous and beautiful; their minds clear-sighted and acute, if narrow; their souls resolute and patient. This life was to them full of pleasure and satisfaction, pain mingled with it, but momentary and local pain, soon passing away, leaving little trace behind. All beyond this world was vague, mere matter of speculation,—

speculation for which they had little taste.

As this world thus limited their vision, so themselves, as the noblest things in it, were most worthy their regard. Superior beings, with power beyond that of man, and controlling him, they knew of, indeed; but they knew them only in their intercourse with man, when they assumed human forms, and were, to the most subtle perception, perfected man and no more.

At a very early period of Greek art, sculptors arose who were capable of carving the human form with an accuracy never before approached. Such work as this seemed to the Greeks perfect and sufficient. They cared little except for representations of gods and men and their deeds, and they demanded perfection of workmanship at any cost or hazard. These they secured, and their art, limited to this single purpose, soon reached inimitable greatness.

The so-called "Ilissus," from the Parthenon pediment, is a colossal statue representing a man reclining on his left side, and supported by his extended left arm, a few folds of drapery falling around the left arm from the shoulder, increasing the strength of the marble column supporting the statue's weight. The feet, hands, right arm, neck and head are wanting, and the surface of the marble is chipped and broken away in many places. Such is a statue which all artists, all critics, will agree in calling very great. What are the merits which command such praise? Let us see.

The falling of the muscles on the under side of the raised right thigh, showing a curious hollow in its inner surface, is pointed out by art professors to their pupils, as a marvellous piece of faithfulness to nature; and it startles anew every observer—a statement surprising to him, and yet which he at once feels to be true. There is a massing together of the waist muscles on the right side, a stretching of those on the left side, and a falling in of the walls of the abdomen, of all of which the same is to be said. Reproduction of natural forms is then the wonder and the merit here. And yet,—is this statue the faithful copy of any man who served as model? It is hard to say. The Greek sculptors could

procure models easily of form more perfect than we can imagine, and had daily under their eyes forms more perfect than we can procure; such were the results of careful bodily education and healthy lives. And yet if, by combining the beauties of more forms than one, the artist could create a form more beautiful than either, without doubt he did so. Observe, he was perfectly free to copy or to combine. He sought to give to his countrymen the image of a hero or of a god. He required for this purpose the most admirable form of man possible to find or to imagine. If he found a living man whose form was, in his eyes, perfect, he copied him exactly. If, in the best form he could find he still saw imperfections, he modified his work by study from another model, or by his memory of many. These sculptors gained such knowledge of the human form that they could carve the ideally perfect human form. There is only one way by which such knowledge could be gained, constant exact copying of the human form as they found it. In short, they studied the body, learned thence what its highest beauty was, and carved such highest beauty.

Did they seek to express anything more than the outside of the body? Our modern sculpture proposes to itself the representation of all manner of sentiments and thoughts, did theirs? Let us see.

To the "Venus of Milo" or Melos, so called from the island where it was discovered, seems to be generally conceded the rank of greatest female statue. The figure may be described as perfect. Probably no man of uncorrupted taste has ever imagined a possible improvement. It is the faultless form of woman, neither too voluptuous nor too severe. It does not seem possible that this statue can have been an accurate copy of any woman. We cannot conceive of a woman uniting such beauty of form with so queenly a carriage, and so grand a face. It is safe to assume that the expression of that face is "given" by the sculptor, not copied, line by line, from any human countenance.

What then does the face express? calm, does it not? But calm can exist only with the great, it is quiet

greatness, the still ocean, not the smooth pond. If the physiognomists have analyzed the face and head, they have found no particular signs of intellect, mathematical or executive or other. In like manner if the student of human nature tries to read thoughts in her placid features, he will be baffled. The statue is generally supposed to have been a "Venus Victrix," holding in the hand the golden apple, the prize awarded by Paris "to the fairest." And it is a triumphant statue, no doubt. But there are no signs in the face of human exultation, that is, of triumph that was not assured before. There is nothing there but greatness which makes triumph certain, and such greatness is quiet, and quiet greatness we call calm. Give to a lovely and noble woman

"Undying bliss
In knowledge of her own supremacy."

And you will see on her features the expression of the Venus of Milo. Suppose that, like Æneas, you should meet a goddess in a wood; at first you would think her a woman, then you would see in her face something more than woman, and if you should try to analyze this "something more," you would find it to be freedom from all signs of weakness, or suffering, or temporary and partial triumph. The Venus of Milo is just such a being—a woman without the shortcomings of humanity.

This statue may serve us as a representative of a large class of Grecian statues, the noblest of all; the gods, goddesses and heroes in placid repose, more beautiful, more stately, everyway greater than man.

Another class is of those in action, but expressing no strong emotion. Such are the Diana of the Louvre, stepping quickly forward, while drawing an arrow from her quiver; the Jason at Munich; the various disc-throwers and fighting gladiators, studies these, of the human body in violent action; the Sleeping Fawn, the Silenus and Infant Bacchus, and other such; also, perhaps, the Belvedere Apollo, in which the expression of face is too slight to be legible, but for the archer's attitude.

The majority of existing Greek statues belong to these two classes. To

offset these and form a third class, we have only such groups as the Laocoon, the Niobe, and the Farnese Bull; even the Dying Gladiator belonging rather to the second class, and being one of the best statues in it.

To our first class belongs all the work of the best periods, and the best work of all periods. In the time of Phidias, and of the great sculptors immediately succeeding him, the purposes of art were—after anatomical truth, which was universally the first aim—splendor and costliness of material, (as in statues of ivory and gold, and of cast "brass" or bronze, also in the jewelry freely used as decoration); colossal size, (much greater than life in all that is left us, many times greater in much that is gone); architectural arrangement and grouping, (each being carved for its especial place, in or about a temple); a general repose, the result of self-restraint in the artist, showing not lack of power over the figure, but a chastened sense of the grand; and always and everywhere the highest beauty of form and grace of attitude. In later times, when art begins to minister to pride as well as to religion, and to decorate the noble's court as well as the temple's front, the spirit is changed, and the grand quiet of the early gods is sacrificed to skipping grace and agile posturing. Still later, and the required display of anatomical knowledge is made no longer in the exercises of the running ground and circus, but by contortions of tortured muscles in the folds of impossible and nugatory serpents; and peaceful beauty is abandoned for features distorted by grief, or writhing in agony of dissolution.

In all this, the greater is given up for the less, the beautiful for the startling, the enduring humanity for the temporary emotion, true art for *tours de force*. This seems to have been perfectly understood among the Greeks themselves. "As distorted as Myron's Quoit-Thrower," was a proverb which has come down to us, the statue named being a very model for truth in anatomy; and all statues representing violent action were ridiculed and opposed by the best taste and knowledge of the time. But the desire to display anatomical science, once awakened, was too strong for opposi-

tion, and the movement went on until this knowledge was lost with all other knowledge and all art in the corrupt later sculpture.

One branch of Greek art requires separate mention, however brief, sculpture in relief. This is always noticeably different in treatment and feeling, and from good cause. The flatter the relief, the nearer it approaches to picture-making, that is to the suggestion of the solid on a flat surface. And, as it thus approaches the art of drawing, so the restraints of the sculpture more and more disappear. The Panathenaic Frieze, for instance, is in the lowest possible relief, that it may be seen by the light reflected steeply up from the marble pavement below; and this frieze gives us, among its varied

life and action, horsemen in triumphal procession, the horses prancing in unconventional freedom, the stately riders without armor or trappings keeping easily and naturally "the warrior's seat."

There are necessary limitations however to bas-relief sculpture, of which one is the uniform representation of the human face in profile. In marble or on coins the face is never shown otherwise than in profile, until the most corrupt periods. The disagreeable results that would follow from the contrary practice must be evident to all, and the prohibition of it must always be absolute in all cases of *realized* or perfect sculpture in flat relief.

To be continued.

THE ARTISTS' FUND SOCIETY, FOURTH ANNUAL EXHIBITION.

EVERY new collection of American pictures gives reason, if only here and there, for some suspicion that the methods of teaching and working which have been in vogue for the last century are becoming as unsatisfactory to the artists, as they have long been to that small portion of the public which thinks about Art at all. It is true that the thinkers are, as they have always been, insignificant in point of numbers, but they have slowly educated the better portion of the public, with whom, although far removed from them in culture, in depth and delicacy of perception, and in aspiration, they have, nevertheless, always sympathized more than with the class of connoisseurs, or knowing ones, a class which has never been able to go beyond mere technicalities, and the material surface of works of art. It is to the persevering praises of the connoisseurs, repeated from generation to generation with not a little assumption, that a great many of the so-called old masters owe their reputation. The thinkers have always refused their homage; the people have maintained an attitude of incredulous indifference, but the worshipers of the Renaissance and the Dutch have carried the day,

without opposition, by mere brag and bluster. The potency of a name, every day of our experience bears witness to, but in no field is its power more overbearing than in the Arts. Once let the connoisseurs decide that a man is a great painter or sculptor—let him decide for himself that he is great, and convince a small knot of personal friends that he is so, and you may almost as well batter at Cheops as try to prove that the public is mistaken. We seriously doubt if, after all John Ruskin's sledge-hammer blows at Domenichino, Carlo Dolce, and others of their tribe—those painters have lost a half dozen of their old admirers. He may have prevented many from following after such idols, but, has he ever converted one confirmed devotee?

The only hope of the thinkers has been, after all, with the very masses who have so quietly submitted to the rule of the connoisseurs. To educate a connoisseur, to lead him to the truth, is a sheer impossibility. You may as well try to raise the dead. The multitude, on the other hand, is never to be despaired of. It is not only teachable, but, out of it come perpetual inspiration and incitement. One great disadvantage under which the artist of the